



Baja Bits & Bytes

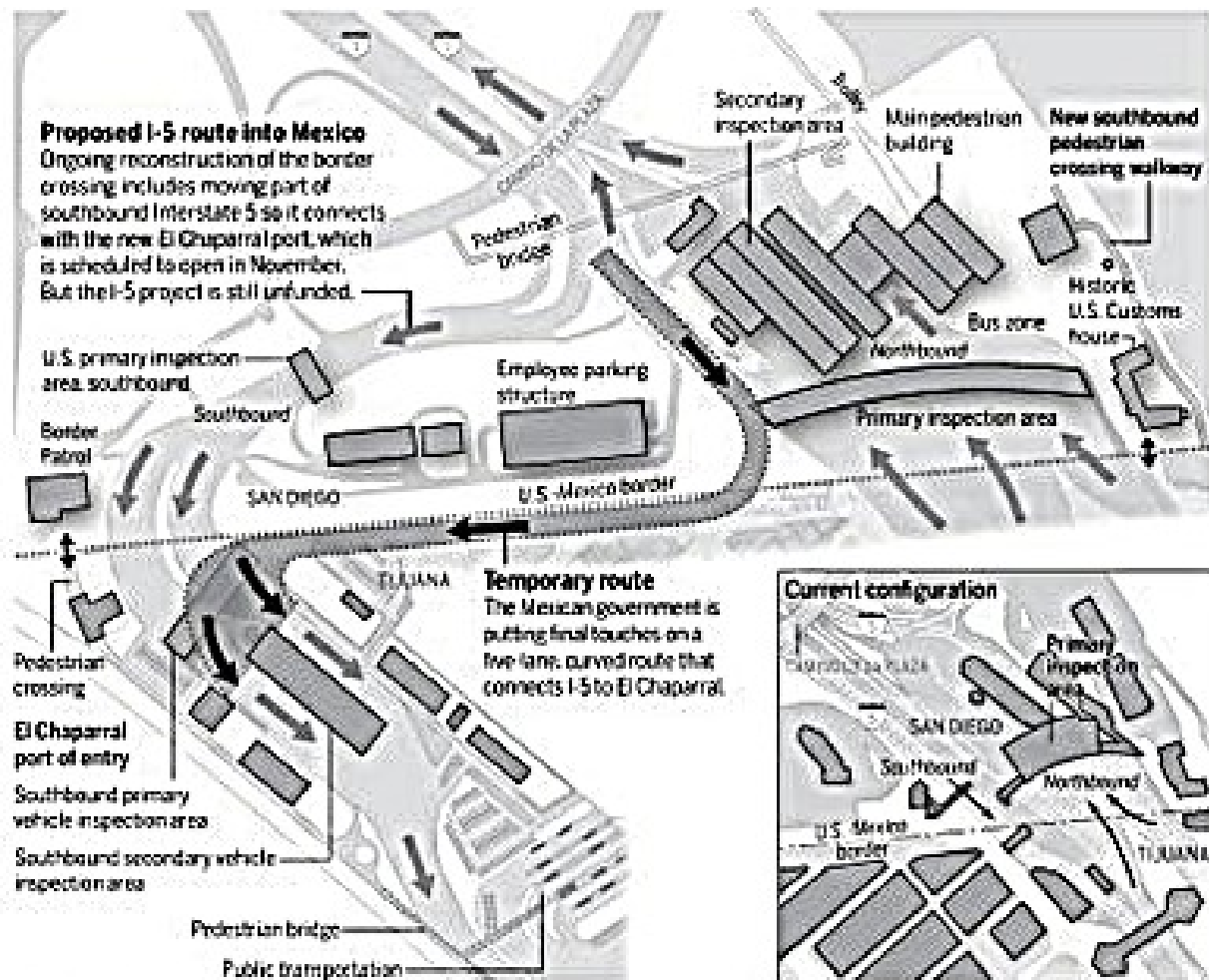
NEWS AND UPDATES FROM DISCOVER BAJA TRAVEL CLUB

NOVEMBER 2012

New El Chaparral Port of Entry to Mexico Open

The new El Chaparral port of entry from San Diego (San Ysidro) into Tijuana, scheduled to open on November 1, opened to the public on October 25. Hugh and Carol Kramer drove through it to scope out the new crossing at the end of October.

The diagram (unfortunately a bit “fuzzy”) below, published in the San Diego Union-Tribune, gives a semi-accurate layout of the awkward routing (dark gray) of traffic from



I-5 to the new El Chaparral entry into Mexico.

When approaching the border, traffic is diverted with a sharp right-hand turn heading west toward the new crossing. (see photo at right)

After traveling approximately 1,500 ft. (see photo below), traffic then makes a



sharp left-hand turn (see photo at right) as you approach the multiple entry lanes into Mexico.



As before, cars wait for a green or red light before proceeding. An abnormal number of red lights came on (including one for us) as cars pulled into the expansive new inspection areas—directly ahead of the entry lanes. If directed into Secondary Inspection, you will likely be asked for your vehicle registration, so be sure to have current registration available.



Once through, signs clearly mark the new routes for Col Federal/ Paseo de los Heroes, La Mesa/ Otoy and Playas/Ensenada Cuota. (see photo at left)

The immigration office for getting pre-paid Tourist Visas stamped with your date of entry (or buying new ones) will be re-located from the old port of entry to El Chaparral on November 1.

Please call Discover Baja [800 727-BAJA] with any concerns or questions.

While the diagram on the previous page shows the 1,500 ft passage (parallel to the border) on the Mexican side, it appears to be on the U.S. side (see second photo with the razor-edge wire fence on the left (south) side.

The proposed permanent I-5 route to the border (see diagram), while designed, is not even funded. Go figure. Plan on the awkward temporary entry route for an indefinite time into the future.

New FMMs (Tourist Visas)

FMMs (or tourist permits) are changing again. This time it is the design. Mexican Immigration has increased the cost slightly, but the cost through Discover Baja will remain the same.

If we have issued you an FMM and you are getting it stamped by November 8th, you will be fine. The date for change is November 9th. If you already have your FMM and will be getting it stamped after November 9th, you may be required to fill out the new form. Your receipt from Banamex must be for 295 pesos. We can issue another Banamex receipt for one peso, if you need it. Just let us know. If you have any questions, just give us a call at Discover Baja 800-727-2252.

Mata Ortiz Trip Successful and Great Fun

The recently completed trip to Mata Ortiz by Discover Baja members and staff was a fabulous success. The adventures were endless. A trip into the mountains to visit the *Cueva de la Olla* (Cave of the Pot) was remarkable. The cave included, not only the 12-foot pot to hold grain, but also a mini village. Check Discover Baja's Facebook page for pictures.

The people we met in the village who invited us into their homes and galleries



were gracious and friendly and their 'ollas' were magnificent.

We brought back several dozen pieces to share with Discover Baja members and make available for sale.

You are invited to our office to browse and shop. The holidays are coming and our pots are works of art that make wonderful gifts for yourself, family and friends..



Dia de los Muertos altar at Discover Baja Travel Club

Dia de los Muertos

Those of you who have visited our Discover Baja office recently have seen our *Dia de los Muertos* altar, honoring the memory of family members, friends and members who have passed on.

Some have asked about the history of Day of the Dead and we are sharing an informative and interesting piece on the subject which we have modified and condensed from azcentral.com:

More than 500 years ago, when the Spanish Conquistadors landed in what is now Mexico, they encountered natives practicing a ritual that seemed to mock death.

It was a ritual the indigenous people had been practicing at least 3,000 years. A ritual the Spaniards would try unsuccessfully to eradicate. A ritual known today as *Dia de los Muertos*, or Day of the Dead.

Although the ritual has since been merged with Catholic theology, it still maintains the basic principles of the Aztec ritual, such as the use of skulls. Sugar skulls, made with the names of the dead person on the forehead, are eaten by relatives or friends.

The Aztecs and other Meso-American civilizations kept skulls as trophies and displayed them during the ritual. The skulls were used to symbolize death and rebirth. The skulls were used to honor the dead, whom the Aztecs and other Meso-American civilizations believed came back to visit during their month-long ritual.

Unlike the Spaniards, who viewed death as the end of life, the natives viewed it as the continuation of life. Instead of fearing death, they embraced it. To them, life was a dream and only in death did they become truly awake.

"The pre-Hispanic people honored duality as being dynamic," said Christina Gonzalez, senior lecturer on Hispanic issues at Arizona State University. "They didn't separate death from pain, wealth from poverty like they did in Western cultures."

However, the Spaniards considered the ritual to be sacrilegious. They perceived the indigenous people to be barbaric and pagan. In their attempts to convert them to Catholicism, the Spaniards tried to kill the ritual. But like the old Aztec spirits, the ritual refused to die. To make the ritual more Christian, the Spaniards moved it so it coincided with All Saints' Day and All Souls' Day (Nov. 1 and 2), which is when it is celebrated today

Today, Day of the Dead is celebrated in Mexico and in certain parts of the United States and Central America. It's celebrated differently depending on where you go. In many parts of Mexico, people visit the cemetery where their loved ones are buried. They decorate gravesites with marigold flowers and candles. They bring toys for dead children and bottles of tequila to adults. They sit on picnic blankets next to gravesites and eat the favorite food of their loved ones.



Art by Patrick Murillo

Mexicans all want the opportunity to honor their dead, so many families build altars in their homes, dedicating them to the dead. They surround these altars with flowers, food and pictures of the deceased. They light candles and place them next to the altar along with their favorite music and their favorite food. It's a beautiful way to honor the memories of their loved ones.

Hurricane Paul Left Flooding and Destruction in its Wake

Mulegé, regrettably, was hit badly by Hurricane Paul in mid October, leaving many homes destroyed and many families homeless. Discover Baja members have, as usual, been most generous in responding to this latest Baja emergency. Boxes piled high with relief materials along with financial contributions have been coming to our office the past few weeks.

We are grateful to those who volunteered to take this much needed relief down to Mulegé.

The bridge south of Loreto at Ligui was destroyed, but a detour is complete. The washouts between



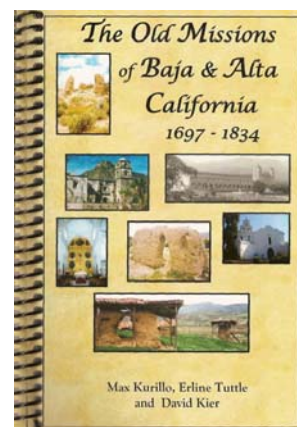
Mulege and Loreto have been filled and are now passable.

Mulegé and nearby areas continue to dry out and recover from hurricane Paul. Thanks to all members who kindly donated relief materials.

New Book on the Missions Available

The new book *The Old Missions of Baja & Alta California 1697 - 1834* by Max Kurillo, Erlene Tuttle and David Kier is now available in the Discover Baja office. This book, with over 160 photographs, is a journal of the chronological founding of the Jesuit, Franciscan, and Dominican missions in Baja California and Alta California as can be seen in today's travels.

The price is \$19.95 (plus tax and shipping.) Give us a call (800-727-2252) and be one of the first to read this new book about our treasured missions.



San Felipe's Goey Ducks Are Neither Goey, Nor Ducks

Ray Eames

After living in this part of Mexico for over a year, I've had much to explore, experience and appreciate. I'm pleased to be able to share with you, my fellow adventurers, some of those experiences here in the DB newsletter.

I met Juan, the supervisor for a Chinese company operating out of San Felipe, through a mutual friend. He very graciously offered to give me a tour of their facility and camps he oversees.

Juan's company farms and harvests goey ducks [Geoduck (*Panopea generosa*)], giant clams renowned for their longevity, taste, and rumored aphrodisiac characteristics.



The two camps, one near San Felipe the other down the coast toward Puertecitos, each have three-two man boat crews. The pangas are fully equipped with outboard motors, dive gear, air pumps, water pumps and ice wells.

This is a very lucrative business for the company as well as the divers and support people. These giant clams can weigh in at over three pounds and can bring in over \$100 USD per pound on the Asian market where they are sold live.

Getting goey ducks from forty feet under the Sea of Cortez and embedded in three to four feet of sandy sea bed to China and keeping them live till they arrive is a wonder, considering the collecting and holding facility (just North of Puertecitos and separated

by several kilometers from where they are harvested) is in the middle of nowhere. Passing the turn off from highway 5, no one would suspect anything was there but desert and the sea.

Lorenzo, the manager, an energetic, multilingual Chinese gentleman, welcomed me to take a look around. Quite a place.

The collecting/holding facility, which employs a dozen people (including a full time cook), consists of 40,000 sq. ft. of warehousing space; 600 sq. ft. drive in freezer; office, kitchen, and the only decompression chamber within several hundred kilometers--all fully self contained. Complete with power generating plants; coolers to regulate water temperature; pumps to aerate the water; filters to keep the water clear; and a forklift to move pallets around. From here, fifty tons of bivalve mollusks can be shipped every two weeks.

After an ice cold glass of *jamica* in the employee cafeteria, I learned from Juan, who had been appraising Lorenzo, his boss, of conditions in the camps, that, not only is the company harvesting, but it is also growing these giant clams in their Ensenada laboratories. Last year they reintroduced 150,000 clams to the Sea of Cortez. This year's goal is 200,000.

Gooley ducks are amazing animals. The tiny, 1/4-inch long juveniles are equipped with a foot that is used to dig itself into the sea floor. These giant clams are also one of the world's longest-lived creatures (over 150 years). More information can be gleaned online including pictures, annual harvest yields, culinary uses, and companies that sell them.

Many thanks to Lorenzo and Juan for their hospitality and generosity.



Ed note: an informative and amusing video on the gooley duck can be view at: www.youtube.com/watch?v=iZhQLoYIbJ4

Gas Prices In Baja



PEMEX prices have increased slightly over the past month, but are considerably lower than US prices: Magna (regular) \$3.15, Premium \$3.31 and Diesel \$3.19.

Peso Exchange

As of 11/01/12, the Mexican Peso is exchanging at 13.01 to the US dollar.

FROM OUR MEMBERS:

COMMENTS, INFORMATION AND "FIELD NOTES" FROM OUR DISCOVER BAJA MEMBERS

Discover Baja member Barbara Anderson writes that you might consider letting people who are headed to San Felipe know that there is still five miles of unfinished, unpaved and very badly marked road construction from Mexicali to San Felipe. You may want to consider, although it is further, coming through Tijuana or Tecate to avoid it.

Member Jim Berrian writes that he returned in early October from a driving trip to La Paz (CIBNOR). I was camping and looking for insects and spiders to photograph for the San Diego Natural History Museum. Starting just south of Santa Rosalia the vegetation is gorgeous, lush and very green and gets more so towards La Paz. It's hot and the camping is buggy but that's okay for this entomologist. The coral vine is spectacular in many areas. I tend to camp off of old dirt roads out of the way. Great traveling.

Returned via Tecate. The road down to La Paz was good (pre-Hurricane Paul). On return from Ensenada to Tecate the road is pretty messy up the grade north from El Testerazo with a lot of earth moving. Also, grading with traffic stops heading into Valle de Las Palmas from the south. Generally, drivers should be careful between Las Palmas and El Testerazo. The road from the latter to El Zaragosa is very nice, and complete.



Baja Bits & Bytes is a monthly online publication of
DISCOVER BAJA Travel Club.

3264 Governor Drive San Diego, CA 92122

Phone: 619 275-4225 or 800 727-BAJA Fax: 858 458-0722

www.discoverbaja.com email: ask@discoverbaja.com

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